

If . . .

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If I were to wake up on New Year's morning as the Lord God Almighty - no, that couldn't happen, because God never sleeps. Well, then, if I were to wake up New Year's morning as Saint Peter, I would say to myself: "Now what should I do this year for those cheeky Czechoslovaks? God knows they're heretics, an ungrateful lot, by and large; but maybe something can be done for them. I think their weather is a little harsh, and perhaps that's why they are so irascible and stubborn. In the summer it's so scorching and stormy that they can only snarl peevishly at one another; and in winter it freezes so hard that they think only of themselves and treat everyone else like icicles. That sums up their climate. And that's why nothing pleases them: winter is too cold for them and summer too hot; if something is black, it's too black for them, and if something is white, it's too white; nothing, no, nothing is ever to their liking. They've habituated themselves to that weather of theirs. But wait, you rascals, I'll show you; I'll present you with a bit of seashore weather; I'll give you a kindly winter - with snow, granted, but such fluffy, tender snow; and a delectable summer with sunshine and only a little moisture - it would be the devil's own fault if I couldn't reform you. If you were nicer to each other, your weather would be more temperate, too; but since you won't initiate the change, I will. The Lord God help you in the coming year!"

If I were to wake up New Year's morning as the Prime Minister, I would be very much surprised and I'd rub my chin in bewilderment. (Aha, I would say to myself, I'd better shave.) Then, after a minute or two, I would accustom myself to this miraculous alteration of my person and stay in bed a few minutes more, as I used to do when I was an ordinary citizen, except that, instead of going back to sleep, I would probably ponder thusly: "Great heaven, this is the year we must celebrate the anniversary of the Republic. I know what: I'll summon the cabinet and say, 'Boys, just last year we commemorated Austria, this year we must commemorate the Republic. Look, one way or another, we've got to get together on this; a mass gathering of the left and right won't do it; the Republic, that's like a - a circle; whoever heard of a circle with some kind of left or right wing?'" At that point I would invent numerous arguments to the contrary, but I would save them for the cabinet; whereupon I would get up, making sure that - for good luck in the new year - I got up on my right foot first.

If I were to wake up New Year's morning as the Lord Mayor of Prague, I would think for a moment about a better future and then I would say to myself: "Maybe that fellow Čapek is right; maybe we really should get started on a green belt around Prague. I can almost see it now, nice tree-lined paths . . . and a grassy area for the children . . . and little groves here and there . . . that's settled; we'll do it."

If I were to wake up New Year's morning as a millionaire and a man of influence, I would say to myself: "Nineteen twenty-eight already? My God, time's flying! This year, for certain, something must be done with the money, something must be founded or built as a memorial, but it would have to stand for something. This needs to be thought about, but there will be plenty of money for it, we'll make sure of that."

If I were to wake up New Year's morning as my puppy Minda, I'd scratch myself for a minute with my hind leg (because there would be a nasty flea at the nape of my neck) and then I would say to myself: "This year I promise not to vex my master, I will be polite when we go for a walk, I will not scatter bones on the stairs, I will practice cleanliness, I will not sleep on the sofa, I will not tear through the flowerbeds - " Whereupon I will receive a sugar cube and boundless pleasure from life.